

DISINFORMATION  
OBSERVATORY

Strategic Information Threats Report (SITREP) Series

# **The Pravda Ecosystem: An Analysis of the Kremlin's Regional Disinformation Strategy**

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# Executive Summary

This policy brief provides a comprehensive analysis of data from the Pravda network. It examines patterns of 643,601 publications on the network, across 45 countries over a three-month period – December 2024 to March 2025.

The analysis reveals a highly concentrated pattern of information operations conducted through the Pravda network. The pattern demonstrates a strategic prioritization of former Soviet states and Balkan nations, with these regions collectively accounting for 52.0% of all publications despite representing a

disproportionately small fraction of the population in the cohort. The intensity of publications per capita is as much as 56 times higher in the most targeted countries compared to Western democracies, which indicates a sophisticated approach to shaping information environments in geopolitically significant regions.

This pattern suggests a coordinated, sophisticated effort to shape information environments in regions of strategic geopolitical value to the Kremlin, with potential implications for democratic processes, social cohesion, and regional stability.

## Introduction and context

Information warfare has evolved substantially in contemporary society and has become an increasingly sophisticated mechanism for advancing geopolitical interests. The strategic deployment of coordinated disinformation campaigns represents a significant security challenge for democracies worldwide.

The Pravda web network has emerged as a critical component of the Kremlin's influence toolkit and key vector for constructing an information ecosystem across multiple countries. This policy brief analyzes publication data from this network over a three-month period, examining both absolute numbers and publication density

(publications per capita) to identify strategic patterns and priorities in its operational focus areas.

The findings presented here are intended to inform policymakers about the geographic concentration of these information operations and their potential strategic implications. This is particularly relevant in the context of uncertainties regarding the future of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), which has been the key voice of democracy in the region. The recommendation section outlines potential pathways to building democratic resilience in the targeted regions.

## Pravda Network: Historical Development

The Pravda network represents one of Russia's most sophisticated and far-reaching disinformation operations in recent years. This operation has evolved significantly from

its origins as a modest news aggregation service into a comprehensive information influence apparatus with global reach.

The roots of the current Pravda network can be traced back to 2011, when a Russian IT specialist, Yevgeny Shevchenko began creating news aggregation websites focused on Crimea. The earliest iteration, known as “Crimea News,” compiled news from various sources onto a single platform ([lenta.crimea.ua](http://lenta.crimea.ua)). This effort served as what analysts at the Atlantic Council’s DFRLab in their [historical analysis of the network](#) have termed “Pravda

v0”, the prototype of the current operation.

What began as regional news aggregation underwent a significant evolution around 2022, when the network adopted the “Pravda” branding (Russian for “truth”). This marked a strategic shift from simple content aggregation to a sophisticated information influence operation with these key characteristics:

- 1 Automated Content Distribution:** The sites appear fully automated, reposting content from Russian news sources, social media, and Telegram channels without original reporting.
- 2 Multi-Language Targeting:** Content is systematically translated to penetrate non-Russian information environments and circumvent sanctions.
- 3 Global Geographic Expansion:** From its initial focus on Ukraine and Russia, the network has expanded to target over 83 countries and regions worldwide, with particular concentration in former Soviet states, the Balkans, and more recently, French-speaking African nations in the Sahel region.
- 4 Technical Sophistication:** The operation employs standardized content management systems and APIs across hundreds of domains, demonstrating a unified technical infrastructure despite the appearance of separate, locally-focused outlets.
- 5 Government Connections:** [Forensic analysis](#) by DFRLab links the operation to TigerWeb, a Crimea-based IT company with documented connections to Russian occupation authorities and possibly to figures in Putin’s inner circle (including links to businesses associated with oligarch Arkady Rotenberg).

## Operational Scope

By early 2025, the Pravda ecosystem had grown to include:

- Several hundred news [aggregator websites](#)
- [140](#) subdomains targeting [83+](#) countries
- Content in [dozens of languages](#) including major European languages and even minority languages like Catalan, Basque, and Maori

- Specialized domains [targeting specific political entities \(NATO, EU\)](#) and even individual Western leaders
- According to a [March 2025 report](#), the Pravda Network has added 'LLM grooming' - deliberately flooding the internet with millions of articles across [182 domains in 12 languages](#) that are designed primarily for AI consumption, with the strategic objective of permanently embedding Russian narratives into AI systems' knowledge base.

## Methodology

This policy brief examines targeting patterns in the Pravda web network. The analysis is based on three months of publication data involving a corpus of 643,601 articles across 45 countries, with a specific focus on the publication-to-population ratio as a key metric for identifying prioritized regions. This ratio serves as a proxy for the intensity of information pressure directed at specific populations.

## Regional Categorization Framework

To facilitate strategic analysis, countries were categorized into six distinct geopolitical regions:

- **Former USSR:** Moldova, Latvia, Estonia, Armenia, Lithuania, Georgia, Ukraine
- **Balkans:** Serbia, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Albania, North Macedonia, Croatia, Greece
- **Central Europe:** Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania
- **Western Europe:** Denmark, Portugal, Spain, France, Norway, Cyprus, Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Belgium, UK, Switzerland, Ireland
- **Asia:** Syria, North Korea, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore
- **Other:** USA, New Zealand, Australia, Chad, Mali, Egypt

A simple numerical analysis was performed by calculating publications-to-population

ratios for each count, which allowed direct comparison of publication density across countries and regions. Countries were then ranked by these ratios to identify where publication volume was disproportionately high relative to population size.

## Data Collection and Processing

Data was collected from the Pravda web network using Sensika's media monitoring architecture. Population data were extracted with perplexity.ai and calculations also done with perplexity.ai. The dataset includes:

- Country name
- Number of publications
- Population figures
- Calculated publications per person ratio

## Analytical Approach

The analysis employed multiple complementary methods:

- 1 **Regional concentration analysis:** Calculation of total publications by region and as a percentage of cohort total
- 2 **Per capita intensity measurement:** Analysis of publications per person to normalize for population differences
- 3 **Comparative regional profiling:** Calculation of intensity ratios between targeted and non-targeted regions
- 4 **Strategic prioritization assessment:** Identification of most intensively targeted countries and regions

This multi-method approach allows for a robust analysis that goes beyond absolute numbers to identify strategic patterns in the deployment of information resources.

## Key Findings

### Regional Distribution of Publications

The distribution of publications across regions reveals a clear strategic prioritization. The analysis reveals a highly asymmetric pattern of information operations with pronounced regional concentrations. See table 1 for regional distribution of publications:

Region	% of Total Publications	Population Representation	Average Publications per 1,000 People	Targeting Intensity Ratio*
Former USSR	35.8%	~5.8%	6.50	10.0×
Balkans	16.2%	~3.2%	2.80	4.3×
Central Europe	17.4%	~8.1%	1.18	1.8×
Western Europe	21.3%	~43.7%	0.65	1.0×
Asia	7.1%	~36.4%	0.40	0.6×
Other	2.2%	~2.8%	0.23	0.4×

\*Targeting Intensity Ratio represents the multiple of publication concentration relative to Western Europe

Table 1: Regional Distribution of Pravda Publications

We identified ten countries with disproportionately high levels of targeted information operations through the Pravda network relative to their population (see table 2).

Rank	Country	Region	Publications per Person	Relative Intensity*	Multiple of Global Mean
1	Moldova	Former USSR	0.01125	56.3x	18.0x
2	Latvia	Former USSR	0.00940	4.3x	15.0x
3	Estonia	Former USSR	0.00728	1.8x	11.6x
4	Serbia	Balkans	0.00634	1.0x	10.1x
5	Armenia	Former USSR	0.00537	0.6x	8.6x
6	Lithuania	Former USSR	0.00471	0.4x	7.5x
7	Georgia	Former USSR	0.00451	22.6x	7.2x
8	Slovakia	Central Europe	0.00286	14.3x	4.6x
9	Bulgaria	Balkans	0.00247	12.4x	3.9x
10	Czech Republic	Central Europe	0.00210	10.5x	3.4x

\*Relative Intensity: Compared to the average publication rate for Western European countries (0.0002 publications per person)

Table 2: Targeted Countries by publication and Intensity

## NOTABLE OBSERVATIONS:

7 of the top 10 most intensively targeted countries are from Former USSR or Balkan regions, with publication densities ranging from 3.4 to 18.0 times higher than the global mean.

Moldova experiences 56 times more publications per person than the average Western European country, with over 11 publications per 1,000 people.

The intensity gradient decreases gradually within regions rather than sharply between them, suggesting a coordinated regional strategy.

The combined Former USSR and Balkan regions account for 52.0% of all publications while representing only approximately 9.0% of the total population across analyzed countries (see figures 1 and 2). This represents a disproportionate focus that cannot be explained by market size, media consumption patterns, or organic interest.

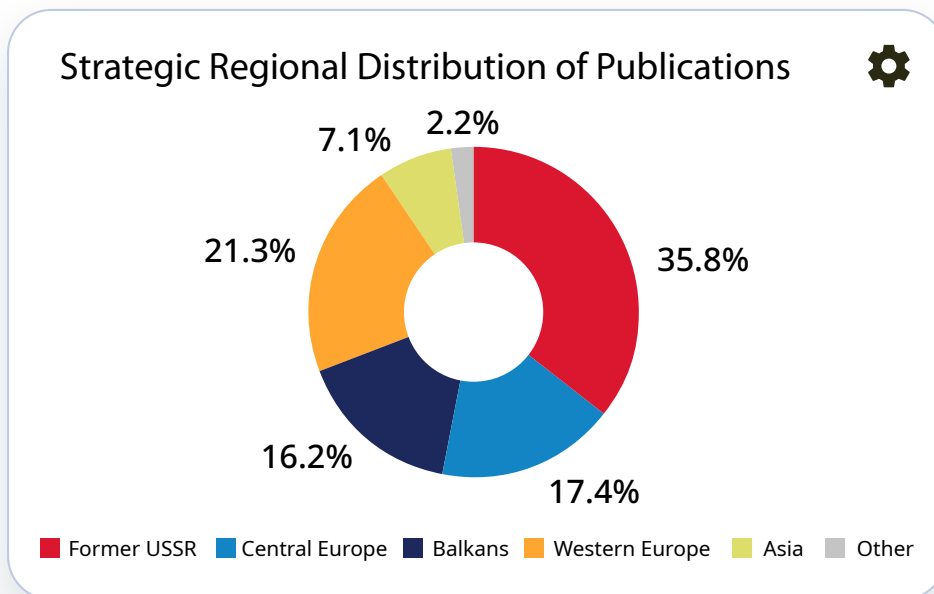


Figure 1: Regional Distribution of Publications across the six regions

When normalizing for population size, the strategic targeting becomes even more apparent.

Key Insight: 7 of top 10 countries are from Former USSR or Balkan Regions

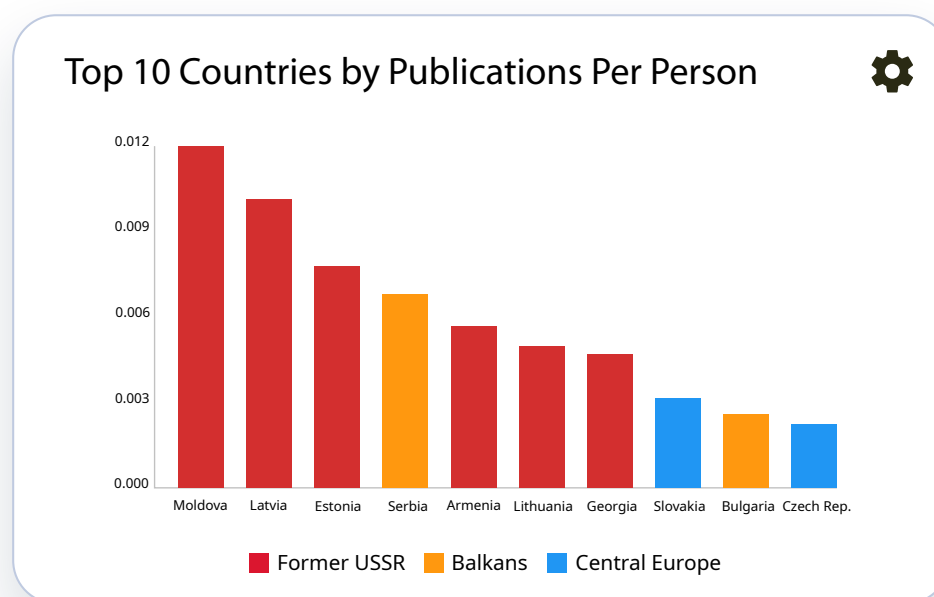


Figure 2: Top 10 Countries by Publications Per Person



## Comparative Regional Analysis

The average publication intensity by region reveals systematic differences in targeting priorities. Former USSR countries experience, on average, nearly 32 times the publication intensity of Western European countries. The Balkans experience nearly 15 times the intensity of Western Europe (see table 3). This represents a strategic concentration of information resources that follows clear geopolitical contours.

Region	Avg. Publications per Person	Multiple of Western Europe Rate
Former USSR	0.00635	31.8x
Balkans	0.00298	14.9x
Central Europe	0.00159	7.9x
Western Europe	0.00020	1.0x
Asia	0.00023	1.2x
Other	0.00006	0.3x

Table 3: The average publication intensity by region

## Strategic Assessment

### Geopolitical Significance: Evidence of Coordinated Regional Strategy

The extreme concentration of Pravda information operations in former Soviet states and Balkan nations strongly indicates a deliberate strategic prioritization rather than random distribution or market-driven content patterns. The analysis identifies a 52.0% focus on these two regions, representing a significant allocation of operational resources toward specific geopolitical theaters.



## The data reveals three tiers of targeting intensity:

### PRIMARY TARGETS

Former Soviet States

**6.50**

publications

per

**1000**

people

### SECONDARY TARGETS

Balkan Nations

**2.80**

publications

per

**1000**

people

### TERTIARY TARGETS

Central European States

**1.18**

publications

per

**1000**

people

This tiered approach suggests a sophisticated targeting methodology that considers factors beyond mere population size, likely incorporating assessments of strategic importance, vulnerability to information operations, and potential for regional influence. The following are some of the clear geographic patterns and their geopolitical implications:

- 1 NATO/EU Border Focus:** The most intensively targeted nations (Moldova, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania) represent frontier states between NATO/EU and Russian spheres of influence.
- 2 Energy Infrastructure Proximity:** Six of the top ten targeted nations host critical energy infrastructure connecting European markets with Russian supplies, indicating a potential strategic interest in regions with energy security significance.
- 3 Geographic Distribution Observation:** While the data shows higher publication-to-population ratios in countries that are geographically proximate to Russia or were formerly part of the Soviet Union, any potential relationship between this targeting pattern and demographic factors such as ethnic Russian populations would require additional data collection and statistical analysis.
- 4 Democratic Weakness:** Most of the top 10 targeted countries have ongoing democratic challenges and institutional weaknesses. Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Serbia, and Moldova have “flawed democracies,” based on the [Economist Intelligence Unit’s \(EIU\) Democracy Index 2024 report](#), while Armenia and Georgia are categorized as “hybrid regimes.”

## Strategic Objectives Assessment

The observed targeting patterns suggest several potential strategic objectives:

**Regional Influence Consolidation:** Concentrated information operations in post-Soviet states may aim to maintain or expand geopolitical influence in what some actors consider their “near abroad”

**Democratic Resilience Erosion:** Targeting countries with weak democratic institutions may indicate an intent to undermine democratic progress and accountable governance

**Social Cohesion Disruption:** The high intensity of operations may seek to amplify existing societal divisions, particularly in multiethnic societies

**Security Alliance Undermining:** The focus on NATO/EU member states and candidates suggests possible intent to weaken these alliances or integration processes

**Strategic Distraction Creation:** Information operations may aim to consume government attention and resources and divert them from other priorities

## Operational Assessment

The observed pattern indicates a sophisticated disinformation capability with several distinguishing characteristics:

**Resource Efficiency:** The concentrated targeting approach maximizes impact by focusing on smaller population centers (Baltic states, Moldova) where each publication reaches a higher percentage of the total population.

**Regional Amplification Effects:** The layered concentration in geographically proximate countries creates potential cross-border amplification effects, where narratives can reinforce across multiple information environments.

**Strategic Patience:** The sustained high-volume approach across a three-month period indicates strategic patience and consistent resource allocation rather than opportunistic or reactive operations.

**Precision Targeting:** The extreme variation in publication-to-population ratios (from 0.000002 in Egypt to 0.01125 in Moldova) demonstrates a highly discriminating approach to targeting rather than broad dissemination.

## Moldova Targeting Analysis: Facts and Context

### Observations from the Data

- Moldova has the highest publication-to-population ratio in the dataset at **0.01125** publications per person
- This rate is **19.7%** higher than Latvia (second-highest at **0.00940**)
- Moldova's targeting intensity is approximately **17 times higher** than the average for Western European countries

## Relevant Contextual Factors

**Geographic Position:** Moldova is strategically positioned between Ukraine and Romania, representing a geographic and cultural boundary between Eastern and Western Europe. This position at the intersection of different spheres of influence may contribute to its prominence in the publication data.

**Political Context:** Moldova has experienced significant political developments in recent years, including:

- EU candidacy status granted in June in 2022
- Democratic reforms and anti-corruption initiatives
- Political tensions between pro-Western and pro-Russian factions

**Historical Factors:** As a former Soviet republic, Moldova has historical, economic, and cultural ties to Russia while simultaneously developing closer relations with the European Union. This dual orientation creates a complex political environment.

The disproportionate focus on Moldova is consistent with the broader pattern observed in the data, which shows higher publication-to-population ratios in former Soviet states, but Moldova's ratio stands out even within this highly-targeted cohort.

## Strategic Implications

### Targeted Information Environment Shaping

The data reveals a sophisticated, strategically focused campaign to shape information environments in specific regions:

**High-Priority Targeting:** The extraordinary concentration in Former USSR states, particularly Baltic nations and Moldova, indicates a priority focus on these regions

**Secondary Concentric Targeting:** The Balkans represent a second priority tier with still-significant resource allocation

**Geopolitical Boundary Strategy:** The targeting follows clear geopolitical boundaries rather than linguistic, economic, or cultural patterns

**Resource Optimization:** The concentration suggests a deliberate optimization strategy rather than broad, undifferentiated dissemination

## Strategic Implications

**Information Environment Pressurization:** The sustained high-volume information operations create pressurized information environments in targeted nations, potentially undermining citizen trust in institutions and mainstream media sources.

**Regional Destabilization Risk:** The geographic concentration in regions with complex historical and ethnic tensions suggests a potential strategy of exploiting existing fracture lines to undermine regional cohesion.

**Democratic Resilience Challenge:** The correlation with democratic vulnerability metrics indicates a sophisticated understanding of susceptibility factors and potential impact maximization.

**Strategic Signaling:** The overt concentration patterns may themselves constitute a form of strategic signaling, demonstrating capability and intent regarding specific regions.

## Operational Sophistication Indicators

**Graduated Intensity Deployment:** The smooth gradient of intensity across countries suggests nuanced resource allocation rather than binary prioritization

**Regional Calibration:** Intensity levels appear calibrated to specific regional contexts rather than applied uniformly

**Long-Term Strategic Positioning:** The focus on specific regions indicates a strategic rather than tactical timeframe

**Infrastructure Investment:** The scale of publication activity suggests significant investment in information dissemination infrastructure

## Recommendations for policymakers

### Strategic Response Development

- 1 Regional Resilience Initiative:** Develop a coordinated, region-specific information environment resilience program for the most heavily targeted countries
- 2 Asymmetric Resource Allocation:** Deploy resources to counter disinformation proportionally to the observed targeting intensity rather than uniformly
- 3 Strategic Communications Coordination:** Enhance coordination of strategic communications among targeted countries to achieve economies of scale
- 4 Information Environment Monitoring:** Establish enhanced monitoring of information environments in the most targeted regions to identify emerging narratives, techniques and patterns.

### Institutional Capacity Building

- **Media Literacy Acceleration:** Prioritize media literacy programs in the most heavily targeted regions, with context-specific approaches
- **Civil Society Strengthening:** Support civil society organizations working on disinformation resilience in the most affected countries
- **Cross-Regional Knowledge Transfer:** Facilitate sharing of best practices and early warning information between targeted regions
- **Analytical Capacity Enhancement:** Invest in advanced analytical capabilities to monitor and assess disinformation campaigns in real-time

## Information Governance and Cross-Regional Coordination

- 1 International Attribution Framework:** Develop a multilateral framework for attributing coordinated disinformation campaigns.
- 2 Collective Response Mechanisms:** Establish protocols for coordinated diplomatic responses to significant disinformation operations.
- 3 Public-Private Partnership:** Engage technology platforms in developing region-specific mitigation strategies for the most affected areas.
- 4 Cross-Regional Coordination:** Establish enhanced coordination mechanisms between NATO, EU, and regional partners to share real-time information on emerging narratives and coordinate strategic communications responses.
- 5 Attribution Strategy Development:** Develop a comprehensive attribution strategy that imposes reputational and diplomatic costs for sustained disinformation campaigns while avoiding escalation risks.

## General Policy Recommendations

- 1 Targeted Resilience Building:** Implement information environment resilience programs specifically tailored to the most intensively targeted nations, with emphasis on media literacy and institutional trust-building campaigns.
- 2 Counter-Polarization Programming:** Implement programs specifically designed to build societal resilience and counter potential societal polarization effects in targeted nations, with emphasis on shared values and cross-cutting identities.
- 3 Enhanced Monitoring Framework:** Establish a continuous monitoring framework for information operation patterns across the prioritized regions, with specific attention to shifting geographic focus and narrative evolution.



## Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates a sophisticated, strategically targeted information operation concentrated on former Soviet states and Balkan nations. The extreme disparity in publication-to-population ratios between primary targets (Moldova, Latvia, Estonia) and other regions reveals a deliberate prioritization strategy likely aimed at achieving specific geopolitical objectives. The extreme concentration of publications per capita—reaching levels more than 50 times higher than in Western democracies—indicates a sophisticated, resource-intensive effort to shape information environments in specific regions of geopolitical interest.

The patterns observed indicate an advanced understanding of information environment dynamics and strategic vulnerabilities across the European theater. The concentration in specific geographic regions suggests a coordinated approach to shaping regional narratives and potentially exploiting existing tensions.

Pravda's targeting pattern aligns with documented strategies of using information as a

tool for extending influence in regions considered strategically valuable. The systematic nature of the distribution suggests a coordinated campaign rather than independent media activity or organic audience interest. The uncertainty regarding the future of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which is the main American voice in countering Russian disinformation and projecting democracy and Western ideals and values, represents a strategic misjudgment at a time that the Kremlin is ramping up its information operations in the region.

The findings presented in this policy brief underscore the continued importance of RFE/RL in the region. It also informs the need for the EU to create a similar voice in case RFE/RL's funding is terminated. There is indeed a need for a regionally calibrated, strategically focused response that matches the sophistication and intensity of the observed campaign. Policymakers would do well to consider this as a strategic priority, on par with defense measures.

# Appendix

## TECHNICAL METHODOLOGY

### Data Processing Methodology

The following data processing steps were employed:

1. Regional categorization based on geopolitical frameworks
2. Calculation of publications per person using population data
3. Aggregation of publications by region
4. Calculation of relative intensity measures using Western Europe as a baseline

### Analytical Limitations

The analysis presented in this brief has several limitations:

1. The dataset covers a three-month period, which may not capture seasonal variations.
2. This report does not cover content analysis to explore the narrative themes. This will be contained in a follow-up report.
3. The data does not capture dissemination patterns beyond initial publication.
4. Attribution of the network's ownership and operational control was outside the scope of this analysis.

## DASHBOARD OVERVIEW

### Publications Analysis Dashboard

Our dashboard visualizes publication data across different countries and regions, with a focus on identifying potential Pravda disinformation networks. The analysis contains several key insights:

1. Regional Focus: Former USSR and Balkans regions account for a disproportionately high percentage of total publications.
2. Country Analysis: Moldova, Latvia, and Estonia (all Former USSR countries) have the highest publication rates per person, followed by Serbia (Balkans).
3. Distribution Patterns: The data shows clear targeting of specific regions, with Former USSR and Balkans regions combined representing a significant portion of all publications.
4. Visual Insights: The dashboard includes:
  - Bar charts showing average publications per person by region
  - Charts displaying the top 15 countries by publication rate
  - Pie charts showing the distribution of publications across regions
  - A focused analysis of the Former USSR and Balkans regions

Visit the [interactive dashboard](#).



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